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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twenty-ninth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 757th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Friday, 18 January 2002, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. KARP
(Vice-Chairperson)

later: Mr. DOEK
(Chairperson)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Gabon (continued) (CRC/C/41/Add.10; CRC/C/Q/GAB/1; HRI/CORE/1/Add.65/Rev.1; written replies of the Government of Gabon to the questions in the list of issues (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room in English and French))

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Gabon took places at the Committee table.

2. Mr. MISSONGO (Gabon) said it was important to stress that the Government of Gabon did not condone the use of child labour. He had been surprised to hear rumours that children were employed to work on the plantations. With increasing levels of mechanization, there was not enough work on the plantations for adults, let alone children. He felt that Gabon had often been unjustifiably criticized concerning child labour. All children living on Gabonese territory received compulsory schooling until the age of 16. It was true that children could be seen working in the streets of the large cities, but all of them were foreign. Every day, more children arrived in Gabon, on the pretext that they were coming to stay with relatives, but in fact they were slaves. In 2001, to demonstrate its position on child trafficking, the Government had turned a boatload of children away, after having provided those aboard with the necessary care and nourishment.

3. He agreed with Ms. Ouedraogo that all children should be able to express their views and concerns in the Children's Parliament, whether enrolled in school or not. There had been no intention to discriminate against any particular group of children; the exclusion of children who were not enrolled in school was merely due to practical reasons, as they often lived in remote areas.

4. With regard to education on the principles and provisions of the Convention, general teaching on the rights of the child was already provided in the civic education programme at primary level. At secondary level, more specific teaching about the Convention was available. The Government was planning a reform of the school curricula to include teaching about human rights and fundamental freedoms.

5. Several measures had been taken to cater for the special needs of disabled children. For example, the Ministry of Social Affairs ran a centre for hearing-impaired children, and there were two private institutions for children who were incapable of attending mainstream schools. The Government periodically provided special orthopaedic apparatus to children with serious mobility problems, and all disabled children were given educational grants. Physically disabled children were accepted at all primary, secondary and higher education establishments, without discrimination. The Government planned to set up a child guidance clinic as part of a pilot project to improve the educational system in Gabon.

6. The Government was currently conducting a national poverty alleviation programme, focusing on the redistribution of wealth. It was hoped that, by means of integrated regional planning, basic social services could be provided at local level.

7. As in other countries, instances of police brutality had been known to occur. An independent body had therefore been created to monitor the police; if an incident of violence involving the police was reported, the said body or the public prosecutor would conduct an inquiry and any member of the police force found guilty of violence would be subject to dismissal or prosecution.

8. Ms. NGOMA (Gabon) said that minorities in Gabon were not subjected to any form of discrimination. They enjoyed the same rights as other citizens, although it was true that they sometimes had to travel to the cities in order to benefit. For example, all citizens had the right to vote provided they had identity papers and had been registered at birth. The Government recognized that minority groups, such as the pygmies, should be able to enjoy their cultural life and practice their traditions. However, the nomadic nature of many of the minority groups in Gabon made it difficult for the Government to provide basic social services. Considerable efforts had been made; for example, villages and schools for minority communities had been built, but each time the nomadic groups had stayed for only two months before moving on. However, some individuals from those groups had achieved a high level of education and were currently helping the Government to find a solution to the problem.

9. The CHAIRPERSON said that other States parties had addressed the problem of providing social services to nomadic populations by introducing mobile services, such as mobile schools, to move with the group. Had the Government of Gabon considered any similar measures?

10. Ms. NGOMA (Gabon) said although the idea of mobile units was worth considering, it would be difficult to put into practice in Gabon under the present circumstances. For a start, it was almost impossible to predict the movements of nomadic groups, and for cultural reasons it was extremely difficult to find professionals willing to staff mobile units and live the life of a nomad in remote rural areas. The Government was focusing primarily on providing services for the minority groups in villages near the areas inhabited by the nomads. Nomadic children could register at village schools provided that they had identity papers. As a rule, they were well integrated.

11. A new law on Gabon's health policy had been introduced in 2000, giving priority to the protection of girls, mothers and children. Under the law, contraception was liberalized, in an attempt to reduce the high number of illegal abortions. Schools now provided counseling services to teach girls about family planning and sex education. Pregnant teenagers were no longer expelled from school and were encouraged to continue their education after giving birth. A day nursery was soon to be opened in Libreville so that mothers with limited resources could benefit from childcare. If the project was successful, nurseries would be opened in other parts of the country.

12. On the issue of assisting children with disabilities, she said that a law had been adopted in 1996 to protect disabled persons, facilitating their rehabilitation and integration into society.

Efforts were also being made to raise awareness of the special needs of disabled children, particularly within the family. Traditionally, disabled children were seen as a curse and measures were being taken to dispel that myth.

13. Replying to a question about the mechanisms available for reporting sexual abuse, she said that the new law on Gabon's health policy had provided for the establishment of a national consultation centre, providing legal and psychological support to victims of all forms of abuse, sexual or otherwise. The ministry of the Family and the Advancement of Women had also opened an advisory unit, run by psychologists, to provide counselling and rehabilitation services. The unit dealt with all issues relating to the family and the advancement of women, including sexual abuse, separation, and custody. The unit had already settled over 200 cases; any cases that it could not resolve were referred to the Ministry of Justice. A bill on harassment was currently being prepared. In reply to a question about violence at school, she said that corporal punishment was prohibited in schools. Girls were also protected by law against any form of harassment at school. The National Council for Communication worked to ensure that the press did not break any codes of conduct regarding the publication of indecent material, and an association had been created to ensure, inter alia, that the media took into account the best interests of the family.

14. Ms. BIKE (Gabon), replying to a question about the percentage of international aid devoted to children, said that Gabon did not receive a large amount of international aid; the real economic situation was often overlooked, perhaps because Gabon was considered to have vast natural wealth and potential for growth. However, it was currently experiencing problems owing to the drop in the price of oil and other resources such as manganese and uranium. Furthermore, Gabon had inherited a very poor infrastructure when it had gained independence in 1960: there had been no roads, railways or ports. The Government's efforts to modernize the infrastructure to allow for development constituted an enormous drain on the country's resources, and meant that for the time being, human development was suffering. International aid was needed, but because of the misleading economic indicators and perhaps because the country's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were still relatively young and lacked influence to sway international opinion, the amount of aid received was negligible and came mostly in the form of capacity-building measures. Top priorities were education and health.

15. In 1992, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had set up an office in Gabon, after much persuasion on the part of the Government. The agency's reluctance had perhaps been due to the fact that the Government had been unable to provide a realistic account of the situation in Gabon. The State party was satisfied that UNICEF had been able to contribute towards improving the protection of children and alleviating poverty. She pointed out that even before ratification of the Convention in 1994, measures had been implemented in Gabon to protect the rights of the child. The Government of Gabon counted on the support of the international organizations. It was true that many of those operating in the country experienced administrative problems and there was a severe shortage of human resources, but their work in helping the State party to comply with its international obligations was appreciated. It was important to bear in mind, however, that the situation of each country was different and the approach taken had to change accordingly.

16. Ms. NGOMA (Gabon) said it was regrettable that the financial, human and material resources allocated to Gabon by UNICEF were insufficient. The Government counted on the assistance of the United Nations agencies to improve the situation of its children, and more could be done.

17. Ms. MBOGA (Gabon), in reply to a question about respect for the views of the child, said in Gabon, legislation set the age of majority at 21, indicating the importance attached to parental authority. Nevertheless, there was no doubt that the Government took the best interests of the child into account, as indicated by the measures that were being taken in favour of the child. In court, the judge often asked to hear the view of the child, although a decision was not always taken on the basis of that view.

18. With regard to a question on how reliably births were registered, she said that a declaration of birth had been compulsory since Gabon's independence. The deadline was 72 hours for urban and 30 days for rural residents. The costs of registration were linked to the declaration, because if a woman had not paid hospital-related childbirth expenses, she did not receive the documents needed to complete registry-office formalities. If the above deadlines were not met, it was possible to ask a court to intervene, but that would give rise to legal expenses. In that sense, such expenses constituted an obstacle to declaring a child's birth. Aware of the problem, Gabon was computerizing its registry offices in cooperation with the Association internationale des mères francophones.

19. Child abuse had previously been passed over in silence, but lately more and more cases were being reported with the help of media campaigns. The judicial authorities investigated every allegation. Children who thought that they had been abused could themselves turn to the prosecutor. Services active in combating child abuse forwarded allegations to the judicial authorities. When proceedings were started, machinery was put into place to protect the child, and a service of the Ministry of Justice responsible for social welfare matters provided child psychologists to look after the child's psychological well-being.

20. On the question concerning wards of the State, she said that the term was outdated, although the idea behind it was maintained, i.e. that certain children had to be looked after by the State. Today, abandoned children were cared for in special State-run centres; when they reached school age, they were enrolled in school.

21. Her delegation had been shocked by the reference at the previous meeting to the notion of a child as a thing. There seemed to be a misunderstanding: in Gabonese culture, children had always been regarded as a blessing. A child must belong either to the father's or the mother's clan, but that did not make the child an object. A child who did not belong to any clan had no roots.

22. As to the question of foster families and child allowances, she said that it was inconceivable that people would prefer to be a foster family rather than an adoptive family. The State did not grant any assistance for adoptions. People who adopted did so out of love and affection for the child, not for financial gain.

23. Ms. BIKE (Gabon) said that one of the questions asked seemed to be indicating that there was something suspicious about certain cases of adoption. She herself had legally adopted the orphan child of a relative, and she could assure the Committee that she did not receive any support from the State, not even tax relief.

24. Ms. NGOMA (Gabon), referring to the abandonment of children, she said that that problem had to be seen in connection with the question of adoption. Legally speaking, street children could not be considered abandoned. The phenomenon typically involved young girls who abandoned their babies in the street. Such infants were found by local inhabitants and brought to the social assistance centres. A procedure had been set up to deal with that question. When it was established that a child had been abandoned, the Ministry of Social Affairs must report to the State Prosecutor, who first tried to locate the mother, in most cases unsuccessfully, as people were reluctant to cooperate for fear of prosecution. The social welfare services then undertook to finance the child's care, including food and lodging and enrolment in school. Child abandonment was a relatively recent phenomenon which was linked to Gabon's worsening economic situation. Government efforts were being stepped up to assist such girls and discourage the practice.

25. A question had been asked about the legal procedure for removing children from their family environment and the reasons that would justify such a step. If it was found that a father or mother treated a child in a degrading manner or that the parents were mentally ill, a judge could decide to remove the child from the family.

26. Ms. BOUMBA LOUEYI (Gabon), replying to a question on how the report had been prepared, said that an interministerial committee of experts had been set up to gather data and draw up the report on the basis of the guidelines received, with the cooperation of a UNICEF expert. Civil servants, NGOs, associations responsible for the rights of children, representatives of religious groups and the regions, youth movements and pupils had attended a workshop and seminar to approve the text. Children themselves had actively participated in the event, giving their views on the content of the report.

27. Ms. NGOMA (Gabon), replying to a question on the participation of children in educational matters, said that pupils attended staff meetings and were in charge of school associations and that a radio station, Radio Emergence, created with the help of development partners, broadcast programmes for young people and was run entirely by children.

28. Ms. BIKE (Gabon), replying to a question on whether broadcasts were censored, said that certain television and radio programmes were in fact censored if they were deemed harmful for minors, for example if they contained scenes of violence or violations of public decency.

29. Referring to the issue of polygamy, she pointed out that cultural habits were not so easy to change. Ideas were evolving, however, and most couples did not want to have a polygamous marriage because it was not economically feasible. Some women wanted to maintain the practice of polygamy; the Committee would be surprised to learn that it was not rural women, but so-called modern, intellectual women who felt that polygamy was a good thing for their families. To claim that children were ill-treated because of polygamy was a simplification: such children had two or three mothers and thus benefited from the attentions of all of them.

Similarly, no one could claim that child abuse in monogamous couples was unknown. There was no correlation between the affection shown by parents for their children and the polygamous or monogamous nature of the marriage. A child could flourish just as well in a polygamous marriage as in a monogamous one if the environment was healthy and the child's protection was ensured; that was not always the case, including in monogamous relationships. Gabon could not abolish polygamy overnight; if it did, the practice would continue in concealed form.

30. The CHAIRPERSON said that the delegation's replies raised the question whether it was better to legislate to bring about changes in cultural attitudes or to wait until society was ready before passing laws. That was a dilemma, but in her view, sometimes legislation had to serve as the catalyst. For example, the Convention was helping to bring about an important change by requiring that the views of the child were heard. Regrettably, there was no legal obligation in Gabon for the views of the child to be heard in all court proceedings and administrative matters, for example with regard to a child's placement. Legislation could also have an impact on violence against children and corporal punishment. Close consideration should be given to finding areas in which lawmakers could help change public opinion and areas in which society needed to evolve before legislation could be passed. She was in favour of a study being conducted on the impact of polygamy on children.

31. She invited members of the Committee to ask questions about basic health and welfare, education, leisure and cultural activities and special protection measures.

32. Ms. OUEDRAOGO asked whether the report had been made widely available and whether it had been commented upon or criticized. On the question of censorship, she asked whether, in addition to television broadcasts, pornographic films or films depicting violence were also sometimes censored. Were there any regulations in that regard for access to nightclubs?

33. Was Gabon planning to redirect its resources to focus on social needs and work more closely with international organizations and institutions? With regard to the delegation's comments on UNICEF, she gathered that that body expected Gabon to work to a greater extent with its own resources.

34. Did Gabon intend to reform the health care and education sectors? The report acknowledged that health care was not widely available to the public, that medicine was expensive and that social security legislation had not been put into practice; those were serious insufficiencies. Did Gabon envisage providing for a policy of essential medicines and primary health care? She would also like to know whether the new health-care policy would focus on prevention, and whether the Government would allocate more resources to purchase vaccines.

35. Concerning breastfeeding, she asked whether Gabon had developed a code of marketing of breast milk substitutes. The initiative to promote breastfeeding must be stepped up.

36. The report said little about adolescent health. How were adolescents assisted with sexual problems? Had the policy to promote school medicine made any progress?

37. The Committee was concerned about the emergence of epidemics. Had a strategy been planned to deal with Ebola? She asked to what extent adolescents were involved in efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, and whether AIDS orphans received any support. The Committee was also concerned at the use of tobacco and alcohol by children.

38. Given the importance of traditional practices in Gabon, she would be interested to know whether any of those practices were harmful to children. In view of the relatively high cost of medicines, she asked whether the Government had considered measures to promote and enhance the effectiveness of traditional medicine. She would welcome an explanation of the policy to address the illicit sale of medicines.

39. Regarding education, she expressed concern over the drop in school attendance, particularly after the primary level. The new educational policy measures should be designed to reverse that trend. She asked for information regarding the results of the census of refugee children. She would be particularly interested to learn what obstacles had been encountered in bringing the situation of refugee children into line with the provisions of relevant international legal instruments. She enquired whether the National Commission on Refugees, created in December 2000, was functioning smoothly, and asked for a description of the situation of refugee children with regard to voluntary repatriation.

40. Referring to the joint Benin-Gabon commission, established in the context of efforts to combat trafficking in children, she said that repatriation was a particular problem. While the delegation had argued that embassies played an important role in that regard, she expressed concern for children from countries without an embassy or without the resources to help with repatriation. Furthermore, it was clear that the commission concerned only Benin, despite the fact that many other countries were involved. She asked for details of measures used to deter and punish convicted traffickers. Could the delegation indicate how close the Government was to ratifying ILO Convention No. 138 concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment?

41. Ms. CHUTIKUL said, with reference to the education indicators provided in the report (paras. 213 to 219), that the repetition and drop-out rates were cause for serious concern. She asked whether the delegation could explain why so many children were repeating years, and what the Government planned to do to improve the situation. Given that only 3 per cent of pupils completed primary school without repeating a class, she was concerned that children were forced to switch to a private school if they had to repeat a year more than once. In view of the unsatisfactory record of the school system, she would welcome details of measures proposed under the national education plan to improve the quality of education.

42. Ms. AL-THANI said that she welcomed the courageous statement made earlier by the delegation concerning polygamy. With regard to funds allocated to health programmes and services, she expressed concern over the reduction in funding to address acute respiratory infections, which remained a significant cause of death. While she welcomed the increased budgetary allocation for malaria and vaccination programmes, she asked for an explanation as to why funds had been withdrawn from the national programme to combat AIDS, in view of the

rising number of AIDS-related deaths. Although it was encouraging to learn of the liberalization of contraception, the high incidence of illegal abortions among young girls indicated either that contraceptives remained difficult to obtain or that most young people remained ignorant with regard to their use.

43. Mr. AL-SHEDDI, welcoming the comments of the delegation concerning activities to combat child labour, said that ratification of ILO Convention No. 138 would be an important step. He asked for information pertaining to cases of child abuse and ill-treatment, including details of how they had been dealt with by the authorities. He expressed concern at the lack of juvenile detention centres, and asked whether any other suitable institutions existed apart from adult prisons. Drawing attention to large regional discrepancies in the school enrolment rate, he asked whether the Government had considered providing mobile services for rural communities. He would be interested to learn of any government support for families which had difficulty paying for their children's education.

44. Ms. EL GUINDI, expressing concern at the rising number of street children, asked for details of steps taken to ensure that street children had access to services such as health care and vocational training.

45. Mr. DOEK said he had been astounded to read that 50 per cent of women had had at least one abortion. He asked how the Government was trying to curb that trend. He would also appreciate an explanation of the low rate of breastfeeding up to four months, which stood at just 14 per cent. What was the Government doing to improve that situation? Very little information had been given in either the report or the written replies concerning children in conflict with the law. The delegation should describe how juvenile criminals were dealt with, and whether it was true that children could be kept in pre-trial detention for up to two years, and that only in Libreville were juveniles kept separate from adult prisoners.

46. The CHAIRPERSON said that the justice system appeared to contain no provision for juvenile courts or rehabilitation centres. Given that cases of ill-treatment of minors in custody had occurred, would the Government consider making the presence of a social worker mandatory during the course of investigations? Could the delegation explain whether the curfew for persons under the age of 21 years was enforced, and why it had been introduced? She would be interested to learn whether steps were being taken to abolish corporal punishment in schools.

47. Ms. OUEDRAOGO asked for further information on government efforts to combat drug abuse among young persons. In her view, the response by the delegation concerning pygmy populations was unsatisfactory. The Government should be examining more closely how to improve the living conditions of pygmy children and, in particular, how to provide them with access to health care and education. She noted that it was also the responsibility of the Gabonese Government to protect the welfare of non-Gabonese citizens working on its territory, particularly in situations of child labour.

The meeting was suspended at noon and resumed at 12.10 p.m.

48. Mr. Doek took the Chair.

49. Mr. MISSONGO (Gabon) said that no curfew had been introduced in Gabon, and that such a step could be taken only in the event of war. The detention of minors constituted an exception rather than a rule, and was restricted to children over the age of 13 years suspected of having committed very serious offences. In such cases, inquiries would be led by an investigating judge with special responsibility for juvenile affairs. The use of pre-trial detention was an incentive for the investigating judge to work as quickly as possible. Although there were no juvenile courts, separate procedures were followed for juvenile cases, including mandatory legal counsel and private hearings. Prison sentences were used only for the most serious offences, and were sometimes considered necessary for the child's own protection. For instance, when a child had committed murder, the judge could order a prison sentence to spare the child revenge by the victim's parents. Juvenile prisoners were kept separate from adults, in sections reserved for that purpose. They were supervised by a social worker with responsibility for the rehabilitation of child offenders. In Libreville prison, teaching rooms had recently been provided to assist the development of juvenile detainees, and health care was always available.

50. Laws were designed to protect the best interests of the child. For example, the presence of minors in liquor outlets and cinemas showing adult films was restricted, and police officers were assigned to enforce those restrictions effectively. Offences against minors were punished severely.

51. The law on excluding pregnant girls from school had been abolished, since it had been a major cause of illegal abortions. In response to the current epidemic of Ebola fever, the authorities had placed a quarantine line around the affected area, and helped to raise awareness among the local population with regard to the necessary precautionary measures.

52. Ms. NGOMA (Gabon) said that the Melen farm school specialized in the social reintegration of children, teaching them a trade to encourage their independence. Minorities and foreigners had their own practices. Although they were admitted into the health and education systems, they did not usually report changes of address, making it virtually impossible for the authorities to ensure that they availed themselves of those services. However, the Government and the population at large did their best to assist them. Marriage between them and Gabonese was by no means discouraged.

53. A special drug-addiction unit and the organization "Agir pour le Gabon" both addressed drug problems. Information campaigns were conducted not only among those affected and their families, but also among the wider population. Given the country's pro-life stance, abortions were banned in Gabon. However, the children born were provided with every assistance, and mothers received discount vouchers for transport and other necessities; enabling legislation was under preparation. Unfortunately, the health budget had decreased together with the general decrease in the State budget. In connection with the Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes, an assembly to be held in March 2002 was expected to result in the marketing of such products.

54. As for the reorganization of the health system, a national health plan was being formulated to reach all sectors of society, and local health boards were elaborating a drug-distribution policy. While it was true that the vaccination coverage rate had fallen, measures were planned to ensure that the entire child population was covered and a new national

health programme was in the pipeline. Admittedly, the authorities needed to step up their efforts to make people, especially young mothers, more aware of the importance of inoculation. Schools had doctors and nurses to tend to children who fell ill and, if necessary, transfer them to the appropriate centres.

55. HIV/AIDS had originally been treated as a public-health problem, but with the epidemic proportions it had attained, the national plan to combat the disease now involved most other ministries, including the Ministry of National Education. A unit to raise awareness of the seriousness of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS had been established in Libreville, and others were being opened in rural areas. The authorities worked in cooperation with UNAIDS and planned to open outpatient centres with the assistance of the Red Cross. Arrangements were being made to purchase vital medicines cheaply, and an AIDS fund of 1 billion CFA francs had been set up with the assistance of the country's international partners.

56. A malnutrition programme had been prepared. Where the Bamako Initiative was concerned, the authorities intended to involve all segments of society. It must be remembered that Gabon was not one of the countries fortunate enough to receive foreign aid for the purchase of drugs; however, it was doing its best to increase drug distribution. As to the traffic in children, Gabon was working closely with Benin to alert other States to its risks. A subregional plan of action had been adopted and a protocol was expected to ensue from the forthcoming meeting in March.

57. Ms. BIKE (Gabon) said that the country had a drug-control brigade trained in Vienna. Special measures needed to be taken in sensitive areas, such as airports, to ensure that Gabon did not become a transit country. The brigade was also involved in alerting young people to the dangers of drugs. Concerning the Bamako Initiative, Gabon, like other countries, was studying intellectual property issues in that regard. The delegation welcomed the fact that the issue of patents would be taken up so as to make low-cost generic drugs available in Gabon.

58. Replying to a number of questions raised by Ms. Ouedraogo, she said that in recent years Gabon had placed the accent on bilateral action but was now moving towards multilateral cooperation. It had always maintained links with the international organizations, but should perhaps be asking them to provide more help. The Government's emphasis on vital infrastructure would be extended to less tangible areas, such as more equal allocation of resources.

59. Her country was host to refugees from Burundi and Rwanda, as well as from Chad even though the two had no common border. The problem encountered with the census of Congolese refugees stemmed from the fact that, since Gabon had no refugee camps, they lodged with families with whom they had traditional links, making the census figures highly inconclusive. However, their repatriation was already under way with the assistance of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In any event, the regulations of the National Commission for Refugees were in full conformity with the Geneva Convention.

60. ILO Convention No. 138 on the minimum age for admission to employment was the only ILO convention not yet ratified by Gabon, but the matter was currently before the

National Assembly. In any event the country's new Labour Code went further than Convention No. 138 in that, to ensure that children completed compulsory education, it set the minimum age for employment at 16 as opposed to the ILO Convention's stipulated age of 14.

61. Mr. NGOGHE (Gabon) said that, in view of the traditional high drop-out and repetition rate, in 1999 the Government had organized a national seminar, with UNICEF and World Bank support. Following the initial provincial seminars, the delegates, meeting in Libreville, had adopted a plan of action, and many of its activities were currently being implemented. They concerned the quality of education, the staff shortfall and the conditions of teachers in remote areas. Additional training programmes designed to train 500 new teachers per year were part of a three-year plan to make good the staff shortage. Incentives would be offered to encourage teachers to serve in the outlying areas and other Gabonese to enter the teaching profession. Upgrading courses would also be offered in Libreville to facilitate promotion from primary-school to secondary-school teaching.

62. In the previous two years the number of pupils entering secondary education had increased sharply, following the Government's endeavours to increase spending on education and improve its quality. The next step would be to abolish the secondary-school entrance examination. Measures to encourage students to remain in school as long as possible included the decision to revive the boarding-school system and to provide textbooks. Gabon was the only sub-Saharan country where children received grants to help defray their education costs.

63. Ms. OUEDRAOGO commended the Government for its report and thanked the delegation for its fruitful dialogue with the Committee. She urged the authorities to underpin action with effective administrative and legislative measures. In particular, it was necessary for domestic law to be harmonized with international conventions. While it would be a protracted process, the authorities should prepare a children's code in the form of a compendium of all legislation pertaining to child protection.

64. She urged the Government to plan more appropriate coordination activities and draw up a list of priorities so that it could better benefit from its links with the international community. Inasmuch as the replies concerning the juvenile justice system had not been entirely satisfactory, she recommended that the Government pursue its reform and ensure the implementation of international norms. She encouraged it to proceed with its initiatives to reduce child labour, and hoped that the country would be in a position to implement the Committee's recommendations.

65. Mr. MISSONGO (Gabon) thanked the Committee for its warm welcome to his delegation and assured it that the authorities would strive to conform to international norms.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.